

Fallen

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> <p> A solitary figure walked the banks of the river, shoulders hunched, hands plunged deep into the pockets of a dark trench coat. His head was bowed, eyes focused on the path immediately in front of him, ignoring the vast stretches of rocky fields and subsistence farms around him. Occasionally he glanced up at the overcast sky, which pressed down on him with all the weight of the millennia he had lived. He thought idly that it was not a good day for an Immortal to get the blues. <p>

He wasn't sure exactly why he had come here, to the Troad plain, except that he wanted to get as far away from France as the continent would allow, and that this was where he had come the last time he had escaped from Kronos and the Horsemen. Three thousand years ago there had been a beach here, where the Hellespont met the north coast of Asia Minor, and the river had been several miles to the east. There had been a great black-walled city that dominated the entire region for centuries, where now there was only sparse brush and broken ground surrounding a gently sloping mound. He had not been here in centuries, but he knew that what remained of Troy, the piles of rubble and occasional outlines of a building, lay just over the next ridge. He debated whether or not to go see them. Perhaps that was what he had come for.

Methos wandered, deciding to see where his feet wanted to go. He felt each step take him farther and farther away from the abandoned submarine base in Bordeaux, from the three headless bodies remaining there, and from the accusing gaze of Duncan MacLeod. Duncan . . .who judged himself and everyone else so easily. Judgment was one thing

Methos hated, judgment without knowledge doubly so. No one could right the wrongs he had committed in his lifetime, not Methos himself and certainly not Duncan MacLeod. A wave of irrational anger swept through him. How dare MacLeod interfere where he had no right! But being who he was, he could do nothing else, and Methos had used that fact to save all of their lives. He supposed he should be relieved; perhaps he would have been if in the process he hadn't sacrificed the most important and rewarding relationship he had had in centuries.

The sudden tingling at the base of his skull startled him. Another Immortal, but he couldn't imagine who would be out here on the deserted plain among the scraggly brush and toppled stones. He was in no mood to confront another of his kind, but there was nowhere to hide, and so he drew his sword and stood his ground, sweeping the area with his eyes to find the source of the buzz he had felt.

His heart froze. There, on the ridge to the north, just where the city should have been.

"Alexandra," he whispered, and remembered.

* * *

> <p> 1138 BCE <p>

He goaded his exhausted horse across the plain. Just a little further, he urged silently. There's the city, I see the walls. Please, don't give up on me now.

He allowed the animal to slow to a walk, knowing if he didn't, he would be without a mount in short order. It had done quite well, considering that the poor beast had been bred to pull carts between villages, not to carry fleeing Immortals at a breakneck pace across half a continent. Still, he missed his own horse, that hardy, war-trained beast who had been his most constant companion over hundreds of miles of hard travel and frequent battles. It was, perhaps, the only living thing he would miss from what he left behind.

This present steed had proved equally stout of heart, if not of body, and seemed like a gift from the gods. It was the only such gift he could remember receiving from the dead deities he had once worshipped. Everything he had had, he had wrested from the Fates with his own wits and angry determination.

Yet the sight and feel of the lone Immortal trader pulling his wares across the rocky plain had sent a great thrill through Methos. All he ever asked for was opportunity, and here it was at last.

He didn't think, just acted, dismounting and slapping his horse to make it run back to the Horsemen's camp as he awaited the approach of the other Immortal. The challenge was perfunctory, the battle even more so as he swung his sword to cut short the life and pleas of the man who knelt at his feet begging for mercy. Mercy had never been his strong point.

Dusk had already begun to claim the daylight, and Methos was pleased to note that the Quickening showed up distinctly against the darkening sky. His brothers were sure to see it and come seeking him.

He buried the man's head as deeply as he could in the hard ground, moving a rock over it to protect the spot from detection. He then hastily stripped the body of its simple clothing, replacing it with his own stained white tunic and trousers.

He donned the dead man's garments and overturned his cart of wares, freeing the horse which reared in terror of him. Methos spoke soothingly to the beast, calming it with a practiced hand. He noted with satisfaction the buzzards which had already begun to circle overhead; by the time his former compatriots arrived at the scene of his final battle, enough flesh would have been devoured to make any question of identity irrelevant. He pulled himself up onto the bare back of his new mount, and kicked it into motion, pressing with his knees to guide it to the west. The merchant had been Trojan by his dress and ornament. Strong walls and strong fighters. He could think of no better place to go.

Now, days later, dusk was falling once again. The gates of Troy had already been shut for the night, leaving Methos cursing as he finally reached the city walls. He had been to Troy before, generations ago when the citadel was much smaller and farms dotted the surrounding landscape for miles. But now escalating tensions with their sometimes trading partners across the seas had brought the Trojan people within the safety of their fortress city, ready to defend their lives and property against invasion. This came as no surprise to Methos; he had contributed more than his share to their fearfulness over the centuries, but he had come here for refuge and he did not intend to be turned away.

He shouted up to the watchtower and pounded on the great wooden gates with the hilt of his bronze sword. "Please, let me in! I was attacked by the Four Horsemen, I barely escaped with my life."

The light of a torch glimmered on bronze armor as a guard leaned over a turret to examine him. He knew his haggard appearance and exhausted horse would work in his favor, and turned his face pleadingly up toward the watchtower. The light vanished, and Methos waited, his impassive expression belying his impatience. At last he heard the release of the massive bolts and the gate slowly groaned open as two of the city guards heaved the ropes from within. It opened just enough for he and his mount to slip through, and then was slammed shut and bolted again.

He dismounted and faced the spear-bearing men. "Thank you. I was terrified they would catch to me, even after I had ridden so far."

"You are welcome here," one of the men replied. "Our elders still remember the last time the Horsemen came through this region. Come, I will take you to the palace. King Priam will want to hear your tale. If the Horsemen are indeed coming back towards Ilium, we will prepare and finish them once and for all."

They were already finished, Methos wanted to tell him, but bit back the words before they could betray him. Kronos, Silas and Caspian would no doubt continue to rape and pillage as well as they could, but without him, their master planner, their reign over the empty stretches of Asia Minor was at an end.

He followed his guide through the sloping streets still teeming with

people finishing their daily business. Reaching the palace, Methos surrendered his horse to the stable hands and allowed himself to be led into an anteroom. There he was told to wait until Priam was ready to grant him an audience.

He was grateful to sit down, even on the hard stone bench. A servant brought him a cup of wine and a plate of bread and meat, which he devoured ravenously. It wasn't enough to satisfy his hunger, but he knew no more would be offered until he had spoken with the king. He stared at the brilliant wall paintings vacantly, going over his story until he could find no flaw in it. Then he merely stared and let his tired mind rest.

The tickle at the base of his neck came as a total surprise to him. Instantly he recognized the feeling and his guard rose again. It wasn't a strong enough buzz to be one of his own kind, but he had encountered enough pre-Immortals in the thousands of villages he had raided to recognize the signature disturbance they gave off. He leapt to his feet and drew his sword, slowly circling the room in search of the cause of the feeling.

Just when he began to suspect that the faint buzz had been conjured by his exhausted senses, he heard a rustle of clothing and a slight shuffling of steps. "Who's there?" he demanded. "Show yourself!"

There was silence. Methos scanned the room carefully, and was about to conclude that the intruder had gone, when he spotted a pair of bright eyes peering curiously at him from behind a column. The eyes were no higher than his waist and he felt an unaccustomed smile twist at his mouth.

A child, then. A pre-Immortal child, like one of the hundreds he had slain over the centuries, bringing them over into immortality, then taking their heads and Quickennings before they could even begin to comprehend what had happened to them. He had felt no affection for the tiny innocents, no remorse for their slaughter, but in recent years they had begun to haunt his dreams. Their eyes looked up at him with trust, then curiosity, and at last terror as the sword came down. He couldn't kill them anymore. If he did, he might never sleep again.

He sheathed his sword and squatted down. "Hello," he said gently. "You can come out, I won't hurt you."

A moment passed, then the whisper of soft footsteps brought a small, dark-haired girl, no more than five years old, into his view. She examined him frankly and he forced himself to keep his countenance open and unthreatening. He imagined his haggard face and torn clothing must seem frightful to such a little one, but she showed more caution and curiosity than fear.

Finally she approached him and they looked at each other in quiet contemplation for a moment. "What's your name?" he asked her at last.

"Alexandra," she replied simply. "Who are you?"

"Methos," he replied with an equal lack of elaboration. It was enough, however, to seal an odd sort of bond between them. She

suddenly flashed him a sweet smile which sent him reeling. So small, so fragile; he could crush her in his hands, and yet she stood close to him and smiled.

Before he could say more, he heard another set of footsteps in the doorway behind him and stood to face the newcomer. A handsome, stately man in his middle years, he wore simple garments and no ornaments, but from his bearing and gaze Methos understood that this must be Priam himself. "My lord," he said, filling his voice with the respect expected. It was important that he win over this man if he wished to find safety in his city.

Priam advanced toward him with a friendly look. "I see I have come too late to greet you, and another has already done it in my place."

Methos was puzzled for a moment, then felt a small hand slip into his. Glancing down, he exchanged a conspiratorial look with his new friend. "Indeed, sire, I feel most welcome already. The young lady does great credit to Trojan hospitality."

Priam smiled and shook his head. "Ah, Alexandra. It shouldn't surprise me you've managed to elude your nurse yet again. Please excuse me while I summon a servant to take my errant daughter off of your hands."

He went back to the door and called loudly for a servant. Methos stood stunned, staring down at the girl. He had figured her to be a servant girl herself, or a fosterling of one of the court nobility at most. Immortals had no parents, and with Priam's large family he had no need to adopt a stranger's child as his own. Perhaps, then, he had found himself a greater ally than he had hoped.

A woman servant quickly came and took her away from him, leading her out with a great deal of scolding for not going to her bath when she was told. The child paused at the doorway to wave good-bye to him. "Good night, Methos," she called.

"Good night, Alexandra," he replied.

* * *

> <p> Three thousand years could change everything, but not the cold wind that blew steadily across the deserted plain, and not the quick flare of Alexandra's smile. Without thinking, Methos found himself drawn step by step up the rocky slope until he was close enough to embrace her and bury his face in her long, dark hair. A shuddering sigh escaped him, as the cold sickness that had gripped his stomach since Kronos had come back into his life dissipate enough for him to breathe again. He knew he was holding her too tightly, but she made no protest and he couldn't let go. <p>

Finally they separated and she looked up at him fondly. "My beloved friend and teacher. You always have a way of showing up when I need you most."

He raised his eyebrows. "And here I was thinking it was you who had come to my aid."

"What's wrong?" she asked, her dark eyes examining his face more

closely in concern. "What's happened, Methos? You look like you've been through another war."

He shook his head and shrugged. "Something like that. Kronos finally found me again."

Her eyes widened in surprise. "After all these centuries...but you're here in front of me, so you obviously survived the encounter."

"He didn't. None of them did."

She understood. "Silas and Caspian, too? You killed them all?"

Methos shuddered. "Only Silas. Duncan MacLeod took Caspian and Kronos. I couldn't do it."

"MacLeod...I've heard of him. The Terminator, some people have been calling him. He's your friend, then?"

"I don't know. He was. But his honor is different than mine; he can't condone what I was, what I did. And Cassandra was there, too, with him, wanting my head."

"Oh, Methos," she murmured, taking his hands in hers. "The past always comes back to haunt us, doesn't it? The curse of immortality."

He smiled down at her. "It's the way it is. You know, until MacLeod you were the only one I told about the Horsemen. In three thousand odd years, you were the only one. And now I know I was right."

"I don't blame you for what you were," she replied seriously. "I only know you from my own experience, as the man who taught me how to use a sword before I was even big enough to hold one, who taught me what I was and kept me safe at the worst time of my life until I could take care of myself. Whatever you were to Cassandra, you were a blessing from the gods to me."

They stood in silence, not finding any further words that needed to be said. After a moment, Alexandra folded her arms across her chest and turned away. The wind pushed her hair away from her shoulders and battered against her long black coat, beginning to rub her fair skin raw.

Something nagged at Methos, prompting him to put a restraining hand on his former student's shoulder. "Alexandra, you still haven't told me what you're doing here."

She glanced up at him sidelong and attempted a smile. "The same as you, old friend. Trying to put my past behind me."

He felt a chill pass through him that had nothing to do with the wind. He knew already what the answer to his next question was, but he had to be sure. He hoped she would tell him without his needing to ask, and sure enough a minute later she spoke again.

"You know, of course, what I'm speaking of," she said softly, waiting for his nod before continuing. "How could you not? It's what has obsessed me for millennia. What drove us apart."

"You've chased him as Cassandra has chased me," he replied, wishing in the next instant that he could have the words back.

She winced almost imperceptibly. "You don't need to say anymore. You don't think I've thought about it? I hate him for many of the same reasons she hates you, for destroying my world. And I suppose that somewhere out there might be someone who loves him as I love you. But that changes nothing."

He suddenly felt even more depressed than before. "No, I suppose it doesn't. You won't let this end until one of you is dead. Maybe not even then."

"I know you don't approve," she snapped. "You never did, it was why you left me. But I swore before my gods that I would kill him, that I would avenge what he did to my brother, my family, my people."

"What did he do to you, Alexandra? He was dead before Troy fell, he never even touched you. Odysseus, Diomedes, Agamemnon, I would understand them, but Achilles?"

She glared at him with a rare hostility. "Don't play mind games with me, Methos. You know how the prophecy worked as well as I do. By murdering Hektor, my brother, he made the destruction possible. He took Hektor away from us, and without him we had no chance. You can't deny that, prophecy or no. And you can't deny how he dishonored Hektor's body, dragging it around behind his chariot even after he was dead, leaving him to rot in the Greek camp for days before my father debased himself to ransom his own son."

He returned her look unperturbed, a look of half-impatient reproof in his eyes that was long familiar to both of them. "I know you practically worshiped Hektor, and loved him dearly. I admired him too, and his death hurt us all greatly. But you can't live your life out of an epic poem, it just doesn't work that way."

She snorted inelegantly. "You're just mad because you didn't even get a mention in Homer."

He was dumbstruck, his eyes widening and his mouth opening without sound for a moment. "Alexandra! I could not care less about what some overblown poet from the islands has to say about me. But please, this is serious."

She hung her head, heaving a sigh and giving up the attempt to distract him. "I know that. I know all the reasons why I should just let go of the past, forget him until one of us loses our head in the course of the Game. But Methos, I swore an oath. I begged the help of Apollo, Artemis, of every god whose name I knew in order to survive. And in return, I swore to take back the blood price, for Hektor, for all of them. I've built life after life for myself in the mortal world, but I've never forgotten the promise I made to my family."

Methos closed his eyes, tipped his head back to face the threatening sky, no longer having the energy to continue their old argument. "Then the time has come, Alexandra?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It will be today, here where it all started for us. Achilles is coming."

* * *

> <p> 1120 BCE <p>

An air of hope swept through the city, refreshing and revitalizing the discouraged Trojan populace who had spent the past decade trapped within their own walls, battling back the Achaean invaders. Methos felt the hope like a breeze, in the whispers of the women and children who bustled through the streets as he strode with a purposeful step toward the citadel to bring the latest news of the war to the king and queen.

He jogged up the stone steps, sweating beneath the full armor he hadn't bothered to take off. He reached the parapet from which Priam and Hecuba watched the battle raging on the beach below in the company of their daughters and daughters-in-law, pausing to bow in respect to the royal women before turning his attention to the king.

"The tide has turned in our favor once more," he told Priam breathlessly. "Achilles still has not entered the battle, and the Achaeans are still weakened from the plague. We have beaten them back almost to their ships."

The elderly king levered himself out of his chair with the help of his staff, and Methos escorted him to the wall to see the course of the battle for himself. In the distance, the black ships of the Greeks dominated the coastline, waiting like malevolent crows to caw the doom of the city. The cold wind blew steadily toward the towers of Troy, bringing to the watchers the roar of men's voices and the clash of spears and swords. Methos watched the disorganized and disheartened invaders scattering before the furious Trojan attack, filled with disdain. They had no strategy, no central organizing force to guide them; if they had, they would have taken the weakened city years before.

"It is fortunate for us that Agamemnon and Achilles are too proud and stubborn to listen to the wily plotting of Odysseus," Priam remarked, earning a startled look from his companion.

"Indeed, my king, I was thinking that as well," Methos admitted, studying the other man's profile as he gazed out toward the sea. Priam was an old man now, unable to lead his own army into battle, but his back was still straight and his mind and eyes were clear. As strong a ruler now as the night Methos had first met him twenty years before, revered by friend and foe alike in a way that struck awe in the Immortal.

Never in his two thousand years of life had he imagined serving a king with the deference and devotion he showed to Priam. He was not accustomed to serving anyone's purpose but his own, taking what he wanted and showing no concern for anyone but himself and occasionally his fellow raiders. He could not pinpoint when his heart had lost its flinty protective shell. Was it Cassandra's pathetic dependence on him, or Alexandra's childish adoration? The screams of the dying innocents hammering away at him whenever he closed his eyes? He might never know what exactly had led him to flee his life as a Horseman to

become a captain of Priam's army, but he had no desire to look backwards now. It was another man who had ridden with the Four Horsemen. Not him. Not anymore.

A faint, familiar tingle in his head made him turn in time to see Alexandra ascend the last step into the enclosed area of the watchtower, the sunlight glinting off of the golden embroidery of her white gown and wrap. She smiled warmly at him before going to kiss her foster mother and sisters. The passage of twenty years had made her a tall and graceful young woman, as strong willed as her mother and as confident as her father. His foreknowledge of her immortality had resulted in hours of sword training. It only made sense that she should learn to protect herself as soon as possible, especially in a time of war. He would make sure that she was not enslaved or murdered by another Immortal as others had been by him. Fortunately she took easily to the lessons, eager to imitate both Methos and her adored older brother Hektor, and her parents looked upon their activities with an indulgent eye.

Holding his bronze helmet under one arm, Methos watched the ebb and flow of the battle for the ships. A flicker of light caught his eye and he touched Priam's arm to bring it to his attention. The spark turned into a blaze, and then another as the foremost Trojan soldiers took advantage of their position to set the closest Achaean ships on fire. Frantic Greek soldiers and slaves ran for water to douse the flames and Methos nodded in satisfaction.

"Your idea, to burn the ships?" Priam inquired with a sidelong look.

Methos smiled slowly. "What better way to demoralize an army, my king, than to destroy their only means of getting home again?"

"Indeed you are right, my clever friend," Priam murmured. "How fortunate that you are on our side. It was good of you to bring the news to us, but I would not keep you from the battle. Go, and bring glory to yourself and the city."

Methos nodded sharply and turned toward the stairs, catching Alexandra's eye as she poured wine for her mother. She paused and looked at him questioningly. He merely smiled and nodded again; she had already looked over the ramparts herself and understood the status of the battle, but wanted his confirmation that it went as well as she thought it did. She grinned at him and turned back to Hecuba, leaving him to descend from the wall and summon his chariot to take him back to the battlefield.

It was pure slaughter as he approached. The wails of the Achaean foot soldiers served as a death knell as the invigorated Trojan forces cut them down. Methos allowed the wind to rip through his sweat-soaked hair as he raced down the beach, sliding his helmet back over his face only as he reentered the heat of the conflict. He leapt from the chariot, snarling as he lifted his spear. Allowing the familiar bloodlust to overcome him, he slammed the metal-tipped point into the gut of an oncoming Greek, twisting it to make sure of his enemy's death before pulling it free and turning in search of another opponent to engage. He had had enough experience in killing that these young mortals did not present much of a challenge to him, even though ten years of constant fighting had tended to even out the

skill level and weed out the truly incompetent.

He had just driven his spear through the breastplate of another enemy fighter when he felt the buzz of another Immortal echo through his skull. He looked up as a familiar Greek chariot swept by and two piercing black eyes met his own. Odysseus, the Ithacan king. The only opponent for whom he bore a grudging respect, the only one who could match his intelligence and who preferred to use his wits over his sword. One of the few Immortals on either side; Achilles, the Trojan captain Aeneas and Methos himself were the only others, and aside from the occasional brief skirmish they avoided each other on the battlefield. Although their comrades tended to attribute their miraculous healing powers to divine descent, none of them wanted to explain away a full Quickening.

Odysseus nodded a curt acknowledgment as he whipped his horses on faster. Methos followed him with his eyes after he had passed, noting that he was heading in the direction of the Myrmidon camp. Another attempt to persuade Achilles to rejoin the battle, no doubt, but Methos was not overly concerned. The young hero's Immortality and royal upbringing had combined to produce a petulance matched only by his ferocity on the battlefield. As long as none of his own troops were engaged in the fighting, Achilles would feel no obligation to involve himself in his fellow Achaeans' plight. Methos applauded the sentiment while looking with scorn upon Agamemnon and the other Greek captains who had allowed the situation to come to such a pass. They had fought alongside Achilles for over nine years, knew his capricious pride, and should have known better than to let him get out of their control.

What a pity.

He fought with ferocity, thrusting and turning instinctively, glorying in the clashing of arms and the scent of spilt blood. He lost himself in the feeling of power, dealing out death with a look, a craving he had learned to suppress, but which still served him in the heat of combat.

When the Myrmidon battle cry howled across the beach, it left cold brushmarks along his spine.

Achilles! Impossible, there was no conceivable argument, no combination of gifts and bribes which could cut through Achilles' petulance so quickly. Yet there he was, in his full, unmistakable armor, racing into the thick of the fight with his men to rescue his comrades.

Methos was stunned, but pulled himself together quickly and began making his way through the chaos toward the new center of battle. He would not dare to challenge Achilles himself, but he could take out one of his lieutenants to try to distract the Greek prince. He was afraid it would drive the already half-mad warrior to new heights of bloodlust, but he could think of nothing else to do. They were so close to destroying the Achaean army completely, he couldn't let Achilles turn the tide back on them now.

Snarling angrily, he cut a path through the Myrmidon onslaught, several of his men following to watch his back. Achilles had left his chariot to fight, letting his trained war-horses use slashing teeth and hooves to keep enemies clear of the vehicle. Methos stealthily

moved behind the shifting chariot until he could see Achilles' back directly in front of him. He wasn't above stabbing another warrior in the back to win a battle, but he had long known that there was no way to put the Myrmidon chief out of commission permanently, and temporary death only made Achilles twice as angry and fearsome afterward. In this case, however, he wondered if it might be worth it to get Achilles out of the way just long enough for the Trojan forces to finish the work they had begun on the black ships.

A pain in his neck alerted him to his unnaturally stiff posture. He realized that his entire body had tensed beyond its norm in preparation for the uncomfortable warning sensation of another Immortal. A warning which had never come.

Something like a sentinel's shout of alarm rang in his head. He worked his way around in time to see the Greek dispatch another Trojan to his gods, and a moment later he was face to face with the other warrior. They gazed at each other for a long moment in silent appraisal.

Brown eyes met hazel. Brown eyes, not blue. Strands of black hair trailed from beneath the crested helm. The armor fit perfectly, but the stance was all wrong.

Not Achilles.

Patroklos. Achilles' second in command, closest comrade, lover and fiercest defender. Twice the man Achilles was, but not twice the warrior.

Methos attacked. If taking out Patroklos, in disguise as Achilles, would stop the Greeks long enough for the Trojans to gain the victory, then he would do it, and deal with Achilles' wrath later.

Their swords clashed as the other defended himself, then backed away. They circled each other warily until Methos, confident of his opponent's mortality, went on the offensive again. They had only exchanged a brief flurry of blows before Methos felt himself being physically hauled away by strong arms, away from the front line. He growled in anger but couldn't break free. He was surrounded by Trojan men, separating him from his Greek target. When the hands at last released him, he whirled furiously to face his captor.

"Hektor!" he shouted, enraged. "What did you think you were doing, interfering in my fight?"

The other man glared back at him through nearly black eyes, his olive skin flushed with ire and battle heat. The greatest of all the Trojan warriors, he was the hope of Troy against Achilles. It had been prophesied that only Achilles could kill him, and that doing so would mean the Greek's own death within a short time afterward. For nine years they had avoided each other on the battlefield, waiting for the moment of their final confrontation, when it was said the fate of Troy would be decided once and for all.

Hektor had removed his helmet, letting his black hair flow freely down his back, and set it aside with his sword and spear while he dealt with his comrade. "Your fight? Achilles is mine! You know that, Methos. No one else has any hope of defeating him, not even you."

Methos nearly screamed in frustration. "That isn't Achilles, you fool! Can't you tell the difference?"

Hektor gaped at him in astonishment. "Not Achilles? But then who?"

"Who in the world would Achilles allow to wear his armor and lead his men?"

Hektor nodded in sudden comprehension. "Patroklos. Of course. I should have known, but their fighting styles are similar."

"Yes," Methos agreed. "But whereas Achilles has the invulnerability of a god...."

"Patroklos," Hektor finished his sentence slowly, "Patroklos is regrettably human."

Methos nodded, letting the Trojan reach his own conclusions.

"I would prefer not to kill him," Hektor mused. "He is an honorable man, and he is the only one on earth with any sort of influence over that Myrmidon madman. But if he crosses me, I will have no choice."

"No," said Methos. "No, you won't."

The Achaean army, revitalized by the sudden appearance of their hero, had surged ahead during the brief Trojan conference, and Methos and Hektor found themselves in the unaccustomed position of pursuers. In their chariots, they caught up to the main mass of fighting, searching for the Myrmidon force which formed the core of the attack. Methos was dismayed to see that Patroklos had led his men through the stunned Trojan defense all the way to sloping walls of the city. Three times the Achaean warrior attempted to scale the walls, and each time fell short of his goal.

On the third try, Hektor reached him.

Methos trailed close behind, ready to back up his comrade if necessary, though he doubted it would be. Little could stand up to an enraged Hektor short of Achilles himself, and nothing enraged Hektor more than a threat to his home and family.

The combat was brief. A blow to the head stunned Patroklos and seconds later, Hektor's spear was in his belly. A moan went up from the Greek spectators, and a stony silence prevailed on the Trojan side. Patroklos was well-liked by all, but Hektor was crazed with bloodthirst and determined to keep the lifeless body as a prize to taunt his archrival. Methos did his part for the cause, beating away as many Greek rescuers as he could, but the grief-stricken Achaeans did not dare face Achilles again without the body of his friend to return to him. The bloody corpse was wrenched away and born with much wailing back to the Greek camps, but not before Hektor had stripped it of Achilles' glorious armor.

Methos sighed as he mounted his chariot and trailed the triumphant Hektor back into the city. A muted rejoicing had begun among the

populace, tainted with a heavy sense of foreboding that had not been present the last time he had walked this way. He followed the same route he had earlier that afternoon and rejoined the royal family without a word on the parapet, accepting Alexandra's ministrations gratefully as she wiped the sweat from his face with the edge of her shawl. There was no need to report anything to them; they had seen the events quite clearly for themselves, and were now merely waiting for some sign of what would happen next.

As Methos expected, they did not wait for long. He had barely had time to thirstily gulp down a small cup of water when a terrifying shriek arose from the Greek lines. It was followed by another full-throated howl, half battle yell and half mourning cry. He and Alexandra rose as one and went mutely to the battlements. Gazing out toward the beach they watched a solitary figure standing in the open and shaking its fist alternately at the city of Troy and at the gods in the sky above.

"He's not taking it well," Alexandra observed wryly. "But better than I'd anticipated. I thought he'd be trying to bash down the gates by now."

"We took his armor," Methos reminded her. "Even Achilles isn't mad enough to take on an entire army in nothing but a short tunic."

"He'll have new armor soon enough," remarked Priam soberly, making his way to join them. "And then he will come for Hektor. There's no doubt of that."

Alexandra moved closer to her father and twined an arm around his waist, serenely confident in her brother's ability to defeat anyone who stood against him. "But we always knew that Hektor would have to face him someday, Papa. I expected it to come much sooner than this."

Methos shook his head. "No reason why it should. War is his life, and he's been enjoying this one thoroughly for the last ten years. He's in no hurry to end it."

"None of them are," Priam said bitterly. "They play with us, knowing we can't hold out forever, that it's prophesied we will fall as long as they keep their pet heroes in the harness. In the meantime, I lose son after son to their blades, and my people have forgotten what a peaceful life is like."

Methos gripped the aging monarch's shoulder in silent understanding. He knew what it was to be helpless at the whim of a force he couldn't control, left to piece together a sundered life as well he could. He knew what it was to be powerless, gathering bits of control from wherever it came, desperate to one day be the one in power again. He had found a kind of power for himself, one that was at the same time intoxicating and soiling, but he had traded it all willingly, and would a thousand times again, for just a taste of what Priam had. The love, the freely given loyalty, the honor and the respect.

But he feared that what Priam had was about to be taken away, by a force of nature who was worshipped almost as a god by all who had seen him on the battlefield. And Methos suspected that not even the might of Hektor could stop him.

* * *

> <p> "Damn him," Alexandra whispered bitterly, wiping a tear that escaped her eye. "Damn him to the depths of Hades for what he did."
<p>

"Are you a goddess, then?" Methos inquired with a raised eyebrow. "Taking the seat of Minos, perhaps, to judge the man's soul and send him to his just reward."

"I can't judge his soul," she replied with controlled anger. "But I can make sure he gets to the Ones who can. If that makes me a goddess, then so be it. I will be Nemesis to him."

Methos sighed and plunged his hands into his pockets again, falling into step beside her as they walked along where the walls of the great city had once been. "Maybe you're right, Alexandra. I'm just so tired, so very tired of judging and being judged. I want my life back under my control."

She took his arm and squeezed it in silent empathy. They walked for a while longer before she spoke again. "I don't know what to tell you, except that I don't think it really matters. Whether it is because he killed my brother and enabled the slaughter of my entire family, or because there can be only one, the end result is the same."

Methos nodded. "I only hope, my little one, that when this is over, you'll be able to have your life back as well."

Alexandra smiled up at him affectionately. "I've missed hearing you call me that, my friend. I miss a lot of things about the old days." She paused a beat, then continued in a voice so soft he had to bend down to catch her words. "Do you know what I dream about?"

He shook his head.

"I dream that I was born the natural daughter of Priam and Hecuba, as mortal as they were. That you were the proud monarch of one of the eastern cities, and that I went to be your queen and bear your children. We could have lived out our lives in wealth and glory and been buried in each other's arms, free from the ghosts that haunt us through every century we survive."

"Oh, Alexandra," he sighed, stopping to tilt her face up to his and look into her tear-filled eyes. "You would have made a grand and beautiful queen, like your mother. But just think of how many episodes of ER' you would have missed if we had died three thousand years ago." The joke fell flat, as he had known it would.

Alexandra drew a ragged breath and looked away. "I'm so homesick, Methos. There are days when all I want is be rid of the weight of the millennia stretching out before and behind me. To be back in my own time, when I thought I understood the world."

"I wish that too, sometimes," Methos confessed. "Things seemed so much simpler then."

"They weren't, though, not really. Unless you mean they were simpler before you met Duncan MacLeod."

He was surprised by her insight, and was not sure what to reply, but he was spared the necessity by the familiar sense of Immortal presence echoing through his head. He and Alexandra looked at each other without speaking, a feeling of approaching destiny settling over them both with a quiet resignation.

They walked back the way they had come, downhill toward the south edge of the city. At the same place Methos had found Alexandra, a small area relatively clear of rubble and brush, waited the other.

It had been over three thousand years since Methos had last laid eyes on this man, but he had no trouble recognizing Achilles. He was of a similar height and build to MacLeod, but whereas Methos had secretly dubbed Duncan his Dark Warrior, Achilles could have mistaken for the Sun God himself. Certainly it was no surprise that the people of his time had thought him descended from Zeus, with his shining golden hair, fair skin and piercing blue eyes. He was dressed casually in the clothes of this age, wearing jeans and a turtleneck sweater, and carried nothing except his massive broadsword.

He glanced briefly at Methos in recognition, then turned his attention to his challenger. "Alexandra, this fight is by your choice. I told you when you called me that I have no desire to pursue this."

"I know that, Achilles," she replied softly, shrugging out of her coat and drawing her own sword. "But you know as well as I that I have no choice. It was because of you that my city fell and my people were murdered and enslaved by yours. I swore on oath on their blood that someday I would seek vengeance for them."

Achilles nodded, and the corner of his mouth quirked upward slightly. "Believe it or not, I have some small understanding of matters of honor. I killed your brother on the battlefield because he slaughtered my lover on the same ground. It was war, it was what we did. And so now you challenge me here in revenge for my own vengeance."

"You killed him cruelly and then dishonored his body!" she flung at him, her voice hoarse with the pain of what she had witnessed so long ago. "You mutilated him, and then humiliated my father by making him pay all the treasure we had left just to ransom Hektor's corpse for a proper funeral."

Achilles' eyes blazed as his infamous temper flared up. "And he tried to do the same to Patroklos! You know nothing of what Patroklos was to me. I would do what I did again, a hundred times over, to put his ghost to rest and ease my pain. And don't wave your misty prophecies at me. Troy fell because you were weak and we were strong. Nothing more than that."

"You mock me," she ground out around gritted teeth.

"And you insult me, Princess Alexandra of Troy," he returned sharply, lifting his blade. "If you want so badly to avenge yourself on me, then speak with your sword."

Alexandra lifted her own blade in reply. "I thought the war ended the

night my city fell. But maybe only today will it truly be over."

* * *

> <p> 1120 BCE <p>

Each night over Troy was darker than the last, since the hero Hektor had died. There had been a brief ray of hope when Achilles perished loudly and publicly from a poisoned arrow, but even that had quickly faded when the Greeks continued fighting as fiercely as before. Nothing had been said, but everyone in the city knew that they could not hold out much longer.

Methos, who knew that Achilles' cold body had been smuggled out of the Greek camp and replaced by Odysseus with that of a Trojan prisoner to be burnt upon his funeral pyre, wondered if the Immortal prince would return to cause the downfall of the city, or if he had already fulfilled Apollo's prophecy when he butchered Hektor in front of his family and countrymen. He stared bleakly at the wall by his bed, unable to sleep more than a few short snatches at a time. Finally he rose and dressed, and headed out through the winding corridors of the palace.

He found himself outside, just feet from the temple of Athena. He would have passed by if he had not noticed the flicker of a torch from within the temple cella. Pure darkness surrounded him as he entered the inner chamber, broken only by the fire that burned at the altar. It illuminated the tall wooden statue of the goddess, who watched with stern eyes over the single worshiper who knelt before her.

Methos approached the altar as well, his footsteps echoing in the silent temple, but not disturbing the other occupant. He knelt down beside her, not needing to draw away the veil she wore over her head to know who she was. They communed silently with the goddess and each other for several long moments before Methos spoke.

"I didn't know there would be a vigil tonight, Alexandra."

She did not answer at first, then slowly drew back her veil and reluctantly sat back on the ground, letting him see the tears that streamed steadily down her cheeks. "She's not listening, Methos. She's turned against us, and I can't reach her."

Methos reached out and took her hand gently. He had never had much use for these Hellenic deities, but he was not foolish enough to speak the thought aloud in this goddess' very sanctuary.

"Let's not talk about the war, tonight," he said instead, drawing her against his side. "Let us speak of other things, and perhaps something else we say will find favor with Athena."

She rested quietly against his shoulder and they both watched the flame burn before the altar. Occasionally they would speak of one or another of their friends or family, remembering happier times when Hektor tripped over his own feet while courting Andromache, or the time when Troilus had let out a herd of pigs to run through the palace, but the conversation always faded as they remembered how many of those friends and family members had lost their lives to Greek spears and blades.

After another of their long silences, Alexandra looked up at him, trying to make out his features in the flickering light. "Methos, do you love me?"

He looked down at her in surprise. "Of course I do, little one. Why do you have to ask?"

She turned her gaze back to the statue of the goddess. "If the war ever ends, Father said he would offer me to you as your bride."

Methos was silent for a moment, stunned by this revelation. "To me? He would marry you to me? But Alexandra, I am not worthy of you. I have nothing to offer you."

She giggled softly and laid her head back down on his shoulder. "Everyone here, they think you are a god in mortal disguise. Did you not know that?"

He suppressed his nearly hysterical laughter; of course he knew, but it all seemed so absurd, almost surreal to him now. "A god? Oh, little one, I am not a god. Far, far from it."

"I know that. I once thought you were, though. The way you never grow a day older, even after almost twenty years here. The way you emerge from every battle completely unscathed, not even a scratch."

"Maybe I'm just lucky."

"Maybe. But I think there's something else about you," she murmured. "I've been waiting for you to tell me what it is."

The silence this time was not as comfortable, as Methos wrestled with his own demons and Alexandra waited tensely for his reply.

"Alexandra, there is something else about me, something different," he said at last, sensing he would get no better chance to tell her about Immortality before she was forced to find out for herself. "Something that has been both blessing and curse to me for many, many years."

"How many?" she whispered, and he wondered how much she had already guessed.

"Over two thousand, now. I'm not sure exactly," he answered, then continued on before she could speak again. "But I'm not a god, though I've pretended I was. Other than my Immortality, I have no supernatural powers. I do not age, but I could be killed by someone who knew how to do it. I do not know exactly what I am, but there are others like me in the world."

"Aeneas," she guessed. "He's not really the son of Aphrodite, is he?"

Methos laughed. "You are very perceptive. But I won't tell you about anyone else, I'll leave it to you to figure them out."

She laughed again, but soon returned to her serious tone.

"Then...will you marry me? If we win the war?"

He sighed heavily, a dull ache in his chest where he thought his heart should be. "I would like nothing better, but I still do not deserve you, Alexandra. I have nothing to give you but ghosts and pain."

"Why do you say that?" she demanded angrily, sitting up and pulling away from him. "If you do not want me, just say so."

"No, no, my little one, that isn't it at all," he hastened to assure her, trying to draw her stiff body back into his arms. "I have done things in my long life, horrible things. Things that I cannot tell you about, that you could not even begin to imagine. I do love you, but you would not love me if you knew the truth about what I have been."

"I will always love you," she said softly, twining her fingers with his. "Tell me, and you'll see. Test me so that you can believe it, too."

So he told her. In the temple of Athena, under the impassive stare of the goddess of war and wisdom, he told her of the Horsemen, of what he had done and what he had destroyed. He spoke for hours, and when he was done, she was silent for a time. Then she kissed his lips softly and curled up against his side once more.

The early dawn light found them there not long after, sleeping peacefully as Athena watched over them both.

* * *

> <p> They woke in the late afternoon, barely stirring at first and reluctant to return to the chaos of the continuing war. Once fully conscious, they heard shouting and music wafting in from the city below, and rising, crept out of the temple to gaze about in wonder. <p>

People crowded the streets, singing and dancing and embracing one another with tears of joy. The unrestrained celebration seemed to radiate inwards from the main gate of the city, drawing Methos and Alexandra to make their way through the crowds in that direction.

To their surprise the gates were flung wide open, with people streaming in and out of the city freely. Methos saw many of his fellow warriors there, without a spear or shield in sight, dancing with their wives or lovers. Above it all towered a massive wooden horse.

Alexandra was looking about in astonishment. "Methos? What is going on here?"

"I don't know," he replied, shaking his head with an equal astoundment. "Come, we'll go back to the palace and see what they know about it there."

He took her hand and pulled her along through the mass of people up the hill and into the citadel. They jogged quickly along the winding corridors to the private quarters of the royal family, finding

everyone they sought in the large banqueting hall.

"Methos! Alexandra!" Hecuba called to the newcomers. "Where have you been?"

"You missed all of the excitement," her husband added merrily. "But you're still in time for the feasting."

"What in the name of the gods is going on?" Methos asked in bewilderment, looking around at the drunken men and women crowding the room. It was such a complete contrast from the atmosphere that had hung over the palace dwellers the night before that Methos felt as though he had somehow stepped into a different world.

"You haven't heard?" Priam said with amazement. "The war is over. The Achaean monsters have given up and gone home, leaving only an offering to Athena behind them."

"The horse," Methos replied slowly. Something about that horse troubled him, but he could not trap the thought long enough to analyze it. He surveyed the room again, noting that not everyone was as wildly joyous as the king and queen. Andromache, the widow of Hektor, sat with her usual calm dignity, holding her toddler son Astyanax in her lap. Helen, the woman whose elopement with Paris had provided the spark for the ten-year conflagration, sat in a place of honor beside Priam, but her face showed little of happiness. Paris had been killed just a few months before, struck down with an arrow in the same manner he had dealt out death to so many of his enemies. Methos thought that he was no great loss, either to Helen or the city, but in the end the former Spartan queen was left with nothing. Cassandra, the second witch he had known of that name, was huddled in the corner as usual, whimpering and crying her eternal message of blood and doom.

Alexandra had gone to sit beside Andromache, taking her little nephew into her arms to cuddle him. Her eyes were bright with excitement, all of her apprehensions about the providence of her goddess washed away in the headiness of hearing the war was over, they had won.

The aroma of roasted meats and wine was intoxicating for a man who had barely eaten in almost two days, and Methos allowed one of the serving girls to lead him over to the head table. He maneuvered himself to sit beside Alexandra, as was their custom, receiving a warm paternal look from the king. The meat, bread and sweet wines were the most wonderful things he had ever tasted, and just for a little while it seemed reasonable to allow himself to hope that all would be well.

The feasting continued well into the night, the exhausted Trojan populace buoyed by their sudden release from the siege. Musicians played exhilarating tunes on the pipes and drums, and Alexandra took the opportunity to pull Methos to his feet and whirl him about the room in exuberant dance steps. No one noticed when she dragged him, protesting mildly, from the room.

The corridor leading from the banquet hall to the private quarters was dark and deserted. Methos felt himself guided halfway down the long hallway, then suddenly stopped and held against the wall.

"Alexandra, what --?" he started to ask her, but was stopped by the feeling of soft lips caressing his mouth. His hands instinctively reached to hold her waist as she twined her arms around his neck and kissed him with great tenderness and great desire.

When at last their lips parted, he somehow found breath to protest. "Alexandra, this isn't a good idea...." He would have continued, but she shushed him by pressing her fingers to his lips.

"Of course it's a good idea," she murmured. "Tonight we've been given our lives back; we should celebrate the joy of life. You want it too, I can feel that."

He supposed it would have been too much to hope for to conceal his arousal from the lithe young body pressed against his. And she was right, he longed for this encounter in his heart as much as she did. An affirmation of life after the specter of death had hung over them for so long. Gratitude for the new life she had given him the night before when she learned the truth about his past and loved him still, the completion of the hope she had given him twenty years ago, when a tiny girl took his hand with perfect trust and made him believe he could live again. A promise for the future, a future that would go on beyond her wildest imaginings, as he guided her into her eventual Immortality, always at her side.

Still, there was something wrong. Something very wrong about all of this. The gates, the walls, someone must watch....

He was dizzy from the wine and her body. Rational thought fled from his mind as she moved against him, her mouth finding his again. She had a natural talent for love, knowing instinctively how to excite him and make him ache to bury himself inside of her. He fumbled for the fastenings of her dress, even as she guided them both backwards into the nearest sleeping chamber.

Their union was equal parts desire and desperation, tenderness overwhelmed by need. He would have been gentler with her if he could, but she did not seem to care, arching up to meet him with an equal need of her own. They took their pleasure in each other and then lay quietly together, sweat cooling their over-heated skin. His arms were like stone bands around her body, keeping her bound tightly to his side.

Ten long years he had fought for these Trojans, and here at last was his prize, his treasure. He was no stranger to the delights of a woman, and in two thousand years of life he had had those who were more skilled or more beautiful. Yet as he lay in the darkness, embracing the woman who was now student, friend and lover to him, he found himself thinking for the first time of men like Hector and Odysseus, men who took their greatest delight not in the gore and glory of battle, but in their wives and families. It was hard to imagine himself settled down, tilling a field and watching a herd, raising a mortal child and running a household. He had always been certain that the Fates would never allow him such a life, that something would always happen to deny him the sort of eternal happiness that seemed now to hover tantalizingly near in the future for him. Surely it would be destroyed, even as he had destroyed the lives of so many others; perhaps Kronos and his brother Horsemens would indeed come again, this time for him.

Alexandra sighed and cuddled closer against his chest. Methos stroked her long, thick hair, and allowed the morbid thoughts of death and destruction to slip from his mind. The present was what mattered, a present entirely separate from the past, with a future that he would shape to his own will. For the moment, he was content to let the heady blend of weariness and intoxication sweep him along toward oblivion. They would sleep now, and in the morning he would make love to Alexandra again. And then again at noontime, and again in the evening. He would seal her to him, body and spirit, a treasure he could not lose.

The gods owed him this much, at least, and he intended to collect on that debt.

As his thoughts faded into slumber, a deeper blackness descended over Troy.

* * *

> <p> Lulled to sleep by the soft sound of each other's breathing, they were awakened by the sound of terrified screams and the clang of metal against stone. Methos, his mind still fuzzy with sleep, barely had time to pull himself into a sitting position when an Achaean warrior in full armor burst into the room, brandishing a sword. He heard Alexandra gasp beside him as the man slashed down at them, missing them by a hair's breadth when they rolled off opposite sides of the bed. <p>

The glare of fire from the corridor was the only light in the room, and Methos frantically groped for any weapon he could find. Cursing himself for having mislaid his own sword in the heat of his lust, he stumbled back against a table, and sweeping his hand across it, seized a slender bronze implement just in time to meet the Achaean's second attack.

Methos snarled in fury and flung himself bodily against the other man, propelling him out into the hallway and slamming him against the wall. The Achaean thrust him away and raised his sword in preparation for a killing blow, but Methos was already coming back at him, thrusting his makeshift weapon into the vulnerable space between helmet and breastplate. His opponent stiffened, then slumped to the floor, dying with a gurgle from his slashed throat. Methos took a closer look, laughing with a touch of madness as he realized he had saved both their lives with a woman's cosmetics applicator.

He turned to look for Alexandra, only to find her just behind him, wide-eyed and trembling. "Methos?" she said in a high voice. "What's going on?"

"We've been betrayed," Methos said darkly. "Come, hurry, we've got to get out of here."

They quickly threw on the clothes they had shed the night before, then he seized her arm and began running down the corridor, trying to shield her from the flames that reached out to them from the rooms already set ablaze by the invaders. They stumbled into the courtyard, choking from the smoke that filled the palace. Methos sighed with relief to note that they had no company there. None living, in any case, he corrected himself, gazing impassively at the gutted bodies

of three of the stable hands lying sprawled on the stones where they had fallen.

"My family," Alexandra gasped when she caught her breath enough to speak. "We have to find them, Methos."

"If they're still here, they are already dead," Methos replied grimly. "Where else would they have gone?"

"One of the temples," she answered. "Even the Achaeans have to respect the sanctuary of the temples."

"Sure of that, are you?" Methos countered, his eyes fixed on a burning building not far from where they stood. Alexandra followed his gaze and let out a little squeak of horror.

"The temple of Athena! They're burning it!"

"Zeus," Methos said decisively. "The most powerful protection they could hope for would be at his temple. We'll look for them there."

They fled the palace on foot, stumbling ever so often over the bodies of slaughtered Trojans. Methos acquired a new sword from the corpse of a fallen Achaean, as Alexandra kicked bitterly at his bloody head.

"Save your ire," Methos told her, scanning the street to find a weapon she could carry. "You will need every ounce of strength you have to survive this night."

She nodded silently, taking the short thrusting blade he handed her, then following him down the hill toward the Temple of Zeus. They took as many side streets as they could, ducking into doorways and down alleys to avoid the Achaean soldiers searching for more Trojans to murder and plunder. The ones they could not avoid, Methos dispatched ruthlessly, using the overconfidence of the armored invaders to his own advantage. They were only a short distance from the temple when two Greeks came at them at once, seeing them as easy prey. Methos viciously hamstrung the first man, driving his sword into his enemy's belly to kill him. He turned to the second attacker only to find Alexandra had already driven her blade into the man's heart through the armhole of his breastplate.

She looked up him as she pulled the sword free. "Impressed?"

"Very," he answered, taking her hand again as they made a final sprint to the steps of the temple.

The temple cella was eerily quiet as they entered. Their footsteps sounded unnaturally loud on the stone floor, and they strained their eyes trying to see through the suffocating blackness. A strangled cry from his companion alerted Methos just before he brought his bare foot down into a puddle of warm, sticky liquid. He knew intimately the feel of blood against his skin, but whereas he normally rejoiced in it, at this moment his heart quailed at the implications of it here.

"No, no, no," Alexandra repeated over and over without sense or

comprehension, frozen in place with terror. Methos put his arm around her shoulders in a futile attempt at comfort, wishing he could usher her away from this place of horror before she saw what must lay before them. He knew she would refuse to leave, however, that she needed to see the truth in order to accept it. And this was no doubt one of the safest places left in the city, having already been looted by the invaders.

"Stay here," he whispered in her ear, waiting until he felt her nod before slipping out of the temple in search of a light source. Fire was not hard to find; already half the city was in flames. He made a primitive torch from a piece of broken timber and clothing ripped from the body of one of his dead countrymen, lighting it in a pool of burning oil that had been spilled when Zeus' offerings were stolen from his sanctuary.

Methos ducked back into the main temple just in time to avoid a band of roving Achaean raiders. He kept the torch low by his side until he rejoined Alexandra, then lifted it high to illuminate the chamber.

Knowing what they would see did not lessen the horror of it. What remained of her family lay there in pools of their own blood, butchered without mercy at the very feet of the king of the gods. Hecuba was sprawled across the altar, her hands raised either to shield her face or plead for mercy, the bloody wound in her breast showing the futility of either gesture. Priam lay crumpled on the ground, his clean white robes dyed red with blood, a sword in his hand evidence of his last attempt to defend his city and family. Others of the royal family -- men, women, and children -- formed a grisly tableau on the cold stone floor.

Alexandra was staring at the body of her father, her eyes wide and breathing in sharp heaves. When he spoke her name she took no notice, so Methos grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her hard.

"Alexandra!" he said sharply. "There is nothing we can do for them now. We have to think of our own survival now."

"Papa...", she whimpered softly, gazing up at him pleadingly.

"I can't bring him back, Alexandra," he said angrily, all the tension of the last hours finding a vent in his impatient tone. "All I can do is try to find a way out of this city and save our own lives."

"Their spirits...", she insisted, her eyes drawn irresistibly back to the still shapes before them. "They can't rest like this."

"Once we are safe, then we will honor them," Methos said firmly. "But if we don't go now, there will be nobody left at all but wandering ghosts."

She did not appear to have heard him, and so he took her by the arm and forced her to move with him toward the entrance. Once outside the temple she seemed to regain her reason, looking around them and gripping her short blade more firmly. Methos nodded in satisfaction and led her down a side street toward the main gates of the fortress.

They followed the same routine as before, dodging the invaders and killing the ones they could not avoid. Methos noted with a sinking heart that they met no Trojan survivors, and the screams of the slaughtered victims were coming less and less frequently. The fires were spreading rapidly and it became more difficult to escape from the waves of heat and clouds of smoke. They came within view of the gates, crouching behind a tumbled statue, and saw Achaean soldiers dragging out Trojan women as prizes of war with as little care as they carried sacks of gold or bolts of silk. Methos thought he caught a glimpse of Andromache struggling against a tall, dark man, but he could not be certain. Nonetheless, he gently directed Alexandra's attention away from the shrieking woman.

"I have an idea," he murmured to her. "I should have thought of this before. Help me find another Achaean body. I'll take the armor and we will walk out of the gates as captor and prisoner."

She nodded wordlessly and crept with him back the way they came. The Achaeans had an unfortunate habit of removing their dead as soon as they found them, which made finding an intact body difficult. Finally they found a man who had met his end in a one-room shop before he could put it to the torch. Methos stripped him of his armor and put it on himself, pausing to kiss Alexandra on the forehead before sliding the helm down over his face.

They started to go back out to the street, but he stopped before they reached the door. "Your sword. You'll have to leave it here."

"I'd rather have it with me, in case we need to fight our way free," she said, clearly uncomfortable at the thought of being unarmed in the midst of the Achaean army.

"They would never allow a captive woman to carry a weapon, and your dress has nowhere to conceal it," Methos explained, drawing on his last reserves of patience and calm. "This plan is good, and it will get us out of here as long as we carry it off."

She closed her eyes and swallowed hard, then tossed her blood-smeared blade onto the dusty floor. Methos nodded his approval and stepped outside.

It was only a few paces to the main street of the city that led out through the gates. As they approached the mass of Greek invaders carrying their booty back to their ships, Methos seized Alexandra's arm and yanked her roughly along. "Struggle a little," he muttered, only loud enough for her to hear. "Make this look real."

She complied as best she could, wailing and trying to pull away from him. He jerked her arm harder, regretting the necessity of hurting her, but pushing away his feelings for the sake of their escape. They attracted little notice from the men surrounding them, other than leers and whistles at Alexandra in her torn and dirty dress. They were almost to the gates when a rough voice halted them in their tracks.

"Ho, comrade! What do you have there?" a man said in Greek. "A princess, by the looks of her. Alexandra, isn't it? The baby they found on the hillside and adopted in place of Paris when they tried to expose him."

Methos turned around slowly to face a bear of a man in Achaean dress. He held his helmet under one arm, allowing Methos to see his face. Diomedes. Not as clever as his good friend Odysseus, but no idiot either.

Leaving his helmet on to hide his face, Methos did his best to imitate the Spartan accent he had often heard in Helen's voice. Perhaps if Diomedes mistook him for one of Menelaus' men, he would allow them to pass unmolested. "Yes, she is. I found her hiding in a closet in the palace, and I claim her as my war prize."

"Slowly, now, my friend," Diomedes said with deceptive softness. "Royalty to royalty, you know the rule. A treasure like her will be greatly desirable to one of the commanders. In fact, I think I might like her for myself."

Alexandra spit on him and he laughed, gripping her chin in one massive hand and turning her head so as to examine her face. She wrenched free, and Methos was hard put to keep her still. He was surprised when she turned her face and spit on him as well; he hadn't expected her to take the realism effort quite so far.

"You see, my friend, she's already an armful for you," Diomedes said with a smile that didn't come close to reaching his eyes. "Let me take her off your hands."

"No," Methos replied simply and coldly. He began to pull Alexandra toward the gates again, but Diomedes moved in front of him and stopped him with a hand against his chest.

"I asked nicely the first time," he growled. "Now I take what I want."

Methos shoved him hard, but was unable to muster enough force to do more than put the bigger man momentarily off balance. Diomedes recovered almost instantly and struck Methos across the face, knocking off his helmet. Methos turned away quickly, but not before Diomedes saw his face.

"Trojan!" he snarled. "Thought you could escape this way with your woman, eh, Methos? Well, prepare to meet the fate of your comrades!"

"For an animal, you do talk a lot," Methos snarled back, drawing his sword and pushing Alexandra out of range.

Diomedes drew his own weapon and attacked. They hacked at each other viciously, without elegance or strategy. It reminded Methos of the way he had seen wolves fight over a kill, though he intended to keep this prize alive as long as possible. "Run, Alexandra!" he shouted, parrying another swipe from the Greek and attempting a thrust of his own. "Get to safety."

He saw her run up the steps that led to the battlements where she had watched most of the war with her family. He renewed his attack on Diomedes, only to have the other man dodge his blade and sprint up the stair after Alexandra. Methos pursued, and Diomedes turned on the steps to parry a blow aimed at his back. They dueled in this manner as they made their way up the staircase, Diomedes running up a few

steps before whirling to beat Methos back. Finally they reached the top of the stairs and began to battle in earnest, driving each other back and forth across the narrow space with violent swings of their swords.

Methos spared a glance for Alexandra, finding her pressed back against the cold grey stone of the battlement, watching the fight with an expression of mingled hope and fear. He attempted to push Diomedes as far away from her as he could, but the Greek was determined to take her. The other man was much bulkier than Methos, and the sheer force of his attack was draining the Immortal's strength. His arms and torso were growing numb, and so he barely noticed the sudden searing pain in his chest. He glanced down in time to see Diomedes pull his blade from where it had pierced his armor, blood spurting from the wound after it.

Methos heard Alexandra's scream even as his knees buckled and he slumped to the ground. He thought frantically that while he had told her that he could be killed, he had not told her how. He tried to shout to her to get away and wait for him, that he would recover from this wound in due time, but all that came out of his mouth was a strangled gasp and a stream of blood.

He saw Diomedes approaching her, saw her scramble to the top of the wall. As if from a great distance, he heard the Achaean's hoarse voice coaxing her to come down to him.

"No," Alexandra said between choking sobs. "I won't let you touch me, you filthy swine."

"This is war, princess," the Greek general told her harshly. "And you lost. You belong to me, now. Come, I won't treat you poorly."

"No!" she protested, taking a step backwards. "You murdered my family, you murdered my lover. I would rather join them in death than live in your captivity."

With a supreme effort of will, Methos managed to pull himself up onto his arms, but Alexandra did not see him. He tried desperately to cry her name, but he could no longer even draw a breath, and he watched helplessly as she pulled away from Diomedes' grasping hands, flinging herself from the walls. He thought he heard her scream as she fell, but the ringing in his ears was too loud to be sure. His last measure of strength ran out and he fell on his face, the stones beneath him turning red, then black, as he died.

He awakened to the sound of thunder, air wheezing through his healed lungs as he groggily sat up. It was dawn, and the sun dimly lit the overcast sky. The clouds above the city glowed with an eerie red light, reflections of the flames that still burned in the devastated city.

Methos got unsteadily to his feet and stumbled over to the edge of the wall. He tried to look down at the ground below, but could see nothing through the smoke and dust. He turned and made for the stairs, practically throwing himself down them in his haste.

He found the streets below deserted, save for the corpses of the Trojan defenders and the huge wooden horse that loomed over it all. The trapdoor in its belly still hung open from when the hidden

invaders had slipped from it the night before and opened the gates for their comrades to enter and conquer. Methos cursed himself bitterly for not realizing the trap. Odysseus' handiwork, no doubt. Preying upon the desperation of the besieged people of Troy, and counting on the hands of the gods to blind them all to their danger.

He left the city through the open gates. No Greeks were in sight, having taken their booty to their camp, hidden just around the curve in the shoreline, out of sight of the city. Methos could see the smoke of their fires rising in the distance, mirroring the billowing clouds still rising from Troy.

He followed the wall around for a few feet, almost stumbling across the small corpse of a little boy. Looking more closely, he recognized Astyanax, Hektor's heir. His mother was no doubt either dead or captured, and Methos said a brief, empty prayer over her son's dead body before continuing on his mission.

He found the one he sought not much further on. Alexandra lay motionless on the rocky ground where she had met her death, her limbs twisted from the impact of her fall. Methos gently arranged her body into a more comfortable position, then sat beside her, chafing her hands and softly calling her name. While he waited for her to awaken, he found himself already planning how they would escape from here. Grief for his fallen friends and the destruction of the city he had called home for nearly twenty years hovered on the outer edge of his awareness, but he savagely pushed it away. He had no time to mourn.

Alexandra returned to life with a shuddering intake of breath. She glanced wildly around her, not recognizing her surroundings. Methos soothed her gently, brushing her hair back from her face and making shushing sounds as he helped her to sit up. Gradually her breathing stabilized and her eyes cleared, and she looked at him with undisguised wonder.

"I jumped," she whispered. When he nodded, she looked up at the high city walls from which she had fallen, then turned her gaze down to her own body, examining her hands in awe. He reached over to grasp them in his, reassuring them both of their continued earthly existence.

"There are a few things about Immortality that I forgot to mention," he told her ruefully. "But I didn't think it would matter so soon."

She was strangely calm, a calm that he recognized as being only a step away from hysteria. "For a moment I thought it was a dream," she told him, gazing up again at the once strong walls. "But I know it wasn't. My family, our friends, they're all dead, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are," he answered. "But we will live on, for as long as we can bear it."

She nodded slowly. "I'm like you, then. Immortal. I died when I fell, but now I live again."

He did not reply, no response being necessary. Thunder sounded again,

directly above them. Zeus' anger at the blasphemy of the Greek destroyers. Moments later they were struck by large drops of rain, which turned into a steady, though gentle, downpour.

The water cleansed the soot and blood from their bodies, turning the ground around them into a muddy lake. Alexandra freed one hand from Methos' grip, cupping it to catch a small pool of water. Then she pressed her palm to her cheek, letting the cold water run down to her neck, seemingly still not entirely believing that she was alive. The rain streamed through her hair and down her face so that Methos, already thoroughly soaked himself, did not realize that she was crying until he felt the sobs begin to rack her slender frame.

He held her hands tightly as she let out her grief and rage against the gods who had abandoned them. He could not let go of his own pain, knowing that he needed to keep watch over her, to salvage what little they had left. When at last she lay gasping and shaking against his shoulder, he drew her up to her feet with him and supported her as they took their first steps away from Troy.

What they walked toward, he had no idea. They had nothing at all, except for each other, and he was not sure that would be enough. But if there was one thing Methos knew, it was how to survive. That much he could give her.

* * *

> <p> Three thousand years later Methos stood again on almost the same spot, watching Achilles and Alexandra raise blades against each other for the first and last time. What he could give her had not been enough to heal the wounds the Greeks had left, but he had kept her alive. He dismissed their dreams of marriage and settled life as a childish fantasies; he really should have known better, even then. He was not meant for such things, and they could have no meaning to Alexandra while the image of her dead parents and siblings still burned foremost in her mind and heart. But he would always love and cherish her, as his former student and lover, and he only wished that they could both find peace within themselves at last. <p>

The two younger Immortals circled each other warily, testing each other with feints before beginning the real fight. Steel soon clashed against steel as they engaged the battle, an entirely different sound than the bronze they had used so long ago, but with the same mental associations.

The two combatants were evenly matched. Both had spent the intervening millennia training for their roles in the Game, and Alexandra made up in quickness and agility what she lacked in bulk. Achilles was still as ferocious a fighter as ever, throwing the whole of his considerable strength against his opponent. Methos had no idea if Alexandra was capable of beating Achilles in an extended contest, but as he studied the patterns of their combat, he could see that she had not forgotten anything he had taught her, and had picked up quite a few new tricks as well, whereas Achilles' fighting style remained basically unchanged since he had last seen him at Troy.

Achilles drove her back across the broken ground with a relentless series of thrusts and swings, but his overconfidence allowed her to get inside his guard and score a deep cut along his ribs. He winced and leapt backwards, fending off her renewed attack with one hand

while clutching his side with the other. He managed to keep her back long enough for the wound to heal, then pushed forward again.

Methos watched in silence, as still as the stone blocks that surrounded him, as the two ancient enemies continued their battle. Only his breathing grew faster as Alexandra pushed Achilles toward the base of a rocky slope, where the footing was even more uncertain. They kept fighting as if they were still on a flat, smooth plain, their footwork unaffected by the unstable terrain, expertise coming from many centuries of battles on natural surfaces of all kinds.

Methos found himself mesmerized by the rhythm of the battle, watching their feet move lightly over the ground and listening to the almost musical sound of their blades. When Alexandra stepped onto the jagged rock just behind her, he found himself unable to shout a warning, or even move at all as events unfolded before him over the course of a few seconds.

Alexandra put her weight on her left foot, unaware of the loose stone below, her ankle twisting and throwing her completely off balance. As she stumbled her weapon dropped for just an instant. Methos tried to shout again, but the constriction in his chest only allowed a hoarse gasp to emerge. She began to lift her sword again in defense, but the momentary opening in her guard was all Achilles needed. He whirled around, bringing his blade down in a clean, lethal arc through her neck.

Methos felt the world spin around him as Alexandra's body slowly collapsed to the ground and Achilles prepared himself to take her Quickening. The mist of power rose from her, followed an instant later by the first strikes of lightning. It seemed to go on forever, as a cold numbness enveloped Methos' heart.

When it was over, Achilles knelt on the ground, trying to catch his breath and assimilate the power of Alexandra's life force that now resided within him. Methos made his way step by slow step until he stood over the Greek prince, with his back turned to what he could not bear to look at closely.

Achilles looked up at him, face flushed with his exertions. "I am sorry, Methos. But it was her choice."

"I know that," Methos replied quietly. "And now it is mine. Take what time you need, then pick up your sword."

"You are challenging me?" Achilles asked in disbelief. "Because of her? This is not your battle, Trojan, not anymore. You've never supported her quest for vengeance."

"No, I have not," Methos agreed with the same eerie calm. "But I cannot let you walk away from here. I will not let this all have been in vain."

"Very well," Achilles replied, getting to his feet and picking up his sword again. "It is your head."

Methos did not speak again, but rather put all of his concentration into the fight. He had never fought directly against Achilles, but he

knew the man's style as if it were his own, and he knew what was effective against him. He was suddenly grateful for the hours spent watching and sparring with MacLeod, for many of the moves he had learned from the younger man turned out to be extremely useful against the more ancient warrior.

He did not spend too long admiring the artistry of their exchanges, the way he did when practicing with the Highlander. This was deadly serious, and he had every intention of finishing it quickly. Fortunately, Achilles was already worn down from his long battle with Alexandra, and he was beginning to make mistakes from fatigue. Methos calculated his move down to a fraction of a second, waiting for the next time Achilles drew back slightly to begin his favorite overhead swing. Methos darted in, took the heavy blow in his chest, and slashed Achilles' throat with his own blade.

The Achaean instantly dropped his sword and fell to his knees, clutching his throat with horrific gurgling sounds. He gazed up at Methos in astonishment, unable to comprehend that he had finally been beaten. Methos ignored the pain from his own wounds long enough to raise his sword for the killing blow. "I'm sorry," he said as he brought the blade down. "This isn't what I wanted to happen."

Quickenings for Methos were always a combination of erotic pleasure and searing agony. As Achilles' Immortal power tore through his body, he arched his back and screamed in pure pain. He felt the essence of the other man course through him, the shining brilliance and the borderline madness, the cruelty and the love. If taking Achilles into himself was like being burned in a fire, then the sensation of Alexandra was a soothing balm to the wounds in his heart. He felt her distinct from Achilles, the newness and power of her Quickening keeping her independent of Achilles' overwhelming personality.

Methos reached out for what was left of Alexandra inside of him, to brace himself against the bolts of energy that surged through him. Memories of her flooded his fading consciousness. Their flight from Troy, dying together a dozen times before making it down the coast of Asia Minor to safe refuge in a town where no one knew who they were; walking through the streets of classical Athens, laughing at the statues of heroes that bore no resemblance to the less flattering reality they had known; arguing with her over almost everything during the Middle Ages, until they ended up avoiding each other until the late Renaissance; how insulted she was when Heinrich Schliemann snubbed her at a party, and how he had laughed until his sides ached, and she slapped him before walking out in a huff.

A feeling of peace came over him, and for a moment he thought she stood next to him, watching the sunset dye the clouds pink and orange. A crushing sensation of overwhelming loss followed just seconds later, and he howled his anguish into the empty space around him, before falling to the ground and lying motionless until dawn.

He regained consciousness as the first light of the day began to illuminate the plain. His wounds were healed, although he still felt as if he had been crushed beneath the weight of an entire army. He steeled himself to look down at Alexandra's body, and found that the action was not quite as traumatic as he had anticipated. Tenderly, he

arranged her, grateful that the rigor mortis had already come and gone, perhaps the final effect of Immortality. Her head lay a few feet away, and he retrieved it, closing her eyes and stroking her cheek one last time. Then he rose with the body in his arms and made his way laboriously up the mound to where the royal burial grounds had once been. He did not know if the ashes of any of the Trojan notables who had been laid to rest in this spot still lay there undisturbed; certainly none of her immediate family had a grave marker there. He did not have an urn for her, nor any offerings for her funeral, but it was the only place he could think of to bring her.

He made her a bed of stones, laying her down gently and sitting for a little while beside her before going to seek out dry wood amongst the brush. He brought back several armloads, sweating from the effort, and arranged it around her, laying her long coat over her body as a makeshift shroud. When his preparations were finished, he looked down at her for a long time, trying to find the words to say good-bye. He wanted to tell her how important she was to him, and always would be, that he had done what had to be done to give her peace in death. But he could not form the phrases in his mind, and had no voice to speak, so at last he settled for performing the final task he could for her.

Pulling a pack of matches from his pocket, twin to the one he had dropped in Romania as a clue for MacLeod in their deadly game of hide-and-go-seek, he struck half the pack at once. He placed the flame delicately among the kindling on her pyre, shielding it with his hands and blowing gently at it until it caught.

He stayed as close as he could as the fire spread, engulfing and consuming Alexandra's remains, until the heat was too much for his still-living flesh. Then he stood watch from a distance until the flames died down and the embers cooled. He gathered her ashes as best he could with his bare hands, shaping them into a small pile and then piling stones around them, forming a cairn of sorts to protect them until they were absorbed back into the earth.

When he was done, he stood and went back down the hill to where Achilles' corpse still lay. He was tempted just to leave it here for the wild dogs and carrion to pick at, but even as he thought it, he knew he would not. Even Achilles had eventually surrendered Hektor's body for an honorable burial, and so Methos dragged him across the ground, searching his memory for the place where the Greeks had burned and buried Patroklos, and later the ashes they had thought belonged to Achilles.

He found the spot on the side of a hill near where the river had once run. The tomb itself was long buried beneath silt and sand, but he lay Achilles there and buried his body beneath stones and dirt. It was a far cry from the golden coffer he had promised to share with Patroklos, but Methos could do no more.

Returning to Alexandra's small barrow, he lay down beside her and waited for the tears to come. When they did, they were uncontrollable, racking his body until his eyes burned and his chest ached, but even then he could not stop. He wept for Alexandra and Silas, and most of all for himself and the loneliness that surrounded him like a shroud of his own. He wept until he had no more tears left, and then merely sobbed in dry heaves until he surrendered to

exhaustion once again. The morning would be soon enough to find shelter.

* * *

> <p> Somehow, Methos found himself back at Joe's, as he always seemed to nowadays. Maurice's Paris bar was not really Joe's, of course, but it might as well have been on this late night, with Joe standing behind the bar and Duncan MacLeod nursing a scotch on the opposite side. It was not surprising that he would end up here, he supposed. After the excruciating destruction of the most important parts of his past in the space of less than a week, he had a desperate need for familiar surroundings and company. Although he had spoken to Joe briefly over the phone before leaving France, wanting to reassure the Watcher that he was still alive, and be reassured in turn that he still had a friend, this was the first time he had seen either Dawson or MacLeod since walking out of the churchyard in Bordeaux. <p>

"Well, now," declared Joe as Methos came through the door just before closing time. "Look who the cat dragged in."

"Dawson, MacLeod," replied Methos, acknowledging them both with a nod before straddling a bar stool a few seats down from the Scotsman.

Joe poured the newcomer a glass of scotch, then took a closer look at his face and slid the whole bottle down to him. Methos smiled wryly in thanks, downing a double shot in one swallow.

Duncan cast him a sidelong glance. "So, where have you been?"

Methos took another long swallow of the liquor, this time directly from the bottle, as he debated as to whether he wanted to answer the question. In Anatolia, he replied at last.

"And?" Joe prompted when no further elaboration was forthcoming. "What were you doing there?"

"I'm not sure, actually," Methos replied, leaning heavily on the bar as he felt the heat of the alcohol working its way through his exhausted body. But I met an old friend there."

He thought he heard MacLeod mutter, "Great, another one," but wasn't entirely sure. There was no mistaking, however, the dirty glare Joe shot the younger of the two Immortals, warning him silently to shut up and let the other man talk.

Methos found himself vaguely amused by the interchange, and was surprised to realize that he did want to talk about it after all. It was somehow important that he tell Alexandra's story to someone, that Joe record it for the Chronicles so that the final battle of the Trojan War would not be lost to history. He doubted that MacLeod would either appreciate or learn from the lessons of her life, but just for this moment, what MacLeod thought had no relevance at all.

"Her name is -- was -- Alexandra," he began hesitantly. "She was my student, many, many years ago."

"Alexandra...", Joe repeated, musing over the name. Methos waited patiently for the Watcher to make the connection. "Alexandra...of Troy? That Alexandra?" At Methos' nod, Joe let out a long whistle, and even Duncan looked impressed. "We lost track of her centuries ago. We assumed she lost her head some time after slipping her last Watcher."

A faraway smile curved Methos' lips. "Yeah, she hated to be Watched. Always did." A long pause followed as he gathered his strength, and then began to speak again. He told his two listeners of the events of three thousand years before, as well as what had occurred on the same ground just a few days ago. When he finished, silence fell in the empty bar.

"I can't believe you challenged Achilles. That was a huge risk," Joe finally said.

Methos only shrugged. "I didn't want to, Joe. I'm not even sure why I did, except that I just didn't want him to live anymore, after killing her." He stared vacantly past his friend, swirling the liquor in his glass idly. "I can't remember ever feeling that way before."

MacLeod, who he knew was no stranger to such emotions, merely looked at him without expression. There was too much to be said between them for them to even have any sort of normal interaction now. Both were in need of comfort, but neither had any to offer to each other.

"Gods, I miss her already," Methos groaned, resting his forehead on his clenched fists. "You know, it was a joke with us, that some day we would settle down together. Get a dog or something. We never did, obviously, and really we never would have. But now that she's gone, I want her back so badly. Just to spend one more hour with her. We always thought we'd each find a lasting, immortal happiness someday, somewhere, but we didn't. And now she never will."

"I know, my friend," Joe said gently. "Losing a friend is never easy. After knowing someone for as long as you knew Alexandra....To be honest, I can't even imagine that."

Methos nodded, blinking rapidly and swallowing repeatedly around the lump in his throat. "She loved me, you know. She knew everything about me, things that even you still don't know, and still she loved me. Without questions, without conditions. There have been times in my life when that was all I had to hang on to. Even when I didn't see her for centuries at a time, I still knew that she existed somewhere in the world, and that she never doubted me. She was the only one."

He stopped abruptly and turned his head away, not wanting the others to see his tears or hear the shaking in his voice, not wanting to make himself any more vulnerable to these men than he already was. Joe continued to wipe the counter, running the soft cloth over the same spot again and again. MacLeod stared down at his empty glass, his face held carefully blank.

Five thousand years of life sometimes threatened to drown the oldest living Immortal, but it also gave him the control he needed to shut

away his grief and pain until he could get to privacy, to safety. He managed to casually down the last of his drink, then rose and tossed a few crumpled bills on the counter. He threw his coat over his arm and headed for the door.

He had almost reached it when he paused and turned back a few paces. He looked directly at Duncan, who met his gaze as if unable to look away from the intensity in the other man's eyes.

"You know something, MacLeod?" Methos said almost conversationally, continuing on without expecting a response. "Do you know why I hate the kind of honor you love so much? Because it kills people. Not just the bad people, but the good ones too. It drove Alexandra and me apart, and now it has taken her away from me completely. And I hate it more than I've ever hated anything in my life."

Duncan bowed his head in acknowledgment of the older man's statement, waiting until the door slammed shut behind the other Immortal before rising himself. Joe looked at him inquisitively, but the Highlander said nothing until his coat was on and he was ready to leave. Then he looked directly at his mortal friend for the first time since Methos had entered the bar.

"He hasn't lost her completely," he said softly. "And he never will. He knows that, he just needs time to remember."

Joe held his eyes searchingly for a long moment, then looked back down at where his hands rested on the smooth marble counter. Duncan went out into the Paris night, leaving the Watcher to the silence and his Chronicles.

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